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ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates effective strategies for helping Taiwanese English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students participate in extensive and active viewing of Chinese-subtitled films outside of the classroom, focusing on how appropriate strategies for watching Chinese-subtitled Hollywood films in authentic viewing environments can guide students toward self-directed learning. The paper illustrates strategies and techniques according to two types of viewing resources. First, there are techniques for how teachers can help students benefit from the viewing resources, such as television or theater productions, which they as viewers cannot control. The techniques are categorized as vocabulary acquisition; listening (setting goals, prediction, tolerance attitude, taking notes, and occasional ignorance); and speaking. The second set of techniques deals with the use of controllable media such as videotapes, video-on-demand systems, DVD systems, or computer playback. When using such technologies, viewers can control their pace and engage in repeated viewing of segments according to their levels and needs. Effective strategies include repeated viewing, taking notes, taking part in related exercises for reinforcing learning, and pre-reading transcripts. The paper concludes that the viewer's self-awareness and determination decide the effectiveness of the strategies. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

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Effective Learner-centered Strategies for Extensive Viewing of Feature Films

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ABSTRACT

This workshop will demonstrate effective strategies for helping students do extensive and active viewing of Chinese-subtitled films outside the classroom, focusing on how appropriate strategies for watching Chinese-subtitled films in authentic viewing environments can guide students toward extensive self-directed learning. The strategies and techniques will be illustrated according to two types of viewing resources. First, there are techniques on how teachers can help students benefit from the viewing resources, such as TV or theater productions, which the viewers cannot control. The second set of techniques deal with the use of controllable media such as videotapes, VOD systems or computer playback. The practical aim of this workshop is to assist teachers who are seeking more learner-centered and self-directed methods which can help their students make use of Hollywood films for self-directed and independent English learning and the acquisition of learner autonomy.

Introduction

As feature film use in the English classroom becomes more and more common, there has been also a growing interest concerning the possible detrimental or beneficial effects of viewing standard-subtitling (L2 spoken dialogues and L1 subtitles) films on linguistic achievements. Many researches also revealed that the passive viewing of mother-tongue-subtitled feature films might not prove very helpful for students' language learning. But in reality, the students in Taiwan are mainly exposed to films subtitled with Chinese text, even though the recent advent and popularity of DVD technology (Lin, 2000a) can provide flexible selection of various subtitles for facilitating viewers' language skills.

Some critics claim that L1 subtitles may have a detrimental effect on students' learning as they become overwhelmingly depending on the translation and neglect their mindful "learning" purposes. How to turn the mother-tongue subtitle into a facilitator and supplement for learners' listening comprehension is the main purpose of this study. This workshop demonstrates that self-directed extensive viewing not only helps language acquisition but also fosters the learners' learning autonomy as long as the appropriate and effective strategies are taken.

This paper first provides the rationale for advocating the extensive viewing of feature films through learner-centered and self-directed practice. This is followed by the review of the previous literature about the benefits and drawbacks of various

subtitles, especially L1 subtitles upon learners' language acquisition. The various strategies and techniques will be illustrated according to two main types of Chinese-subtitling film resources: *controllable* and *uncontrollable*. It is hoped that this demonstration can help teachers who are interested in seeking for some self-directed and learner-centered methodologies with some practical suggestions and guidelines toward the use of films in the EFL classroom.

Review of Literature

In this author's many years' experiences in making use of films as the main teaching resources, she discovered that one of the most efficient and effective way for students to enhance their listening is to implement the skills taught in class for the extensive self-directed viewing in their daily life through the easy-access resources such as going to movies or watching TV at home. Although the instruction in classroom can provide learners with various activities, the time limit in the class and the large class size refrain students' from acquiring quantity of comprehensive input, which is considered by Krashen (1988) as a vital process for learners' language acquisition. With more extensively learner-centered and self-directed learning activities, students can have sufficient input and reach the level of natural language acquisition. Further, according to Krashen's Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1988), foreign language acquisition can be best acquired in circumstances when the learners' filter of anxiety is lowered, and the input is adjusted to include a wide "net" of complex, simple and challenging language. The value of L1 subtitles is that they can bring comprehension to truly difficult input.

Some researchers (Katchen, 1996, Chiang, 1997) in Taiwan mentioned that it is better not to show Chinese students films with Chinese subtitles or with entire length in the classroom, for the viewers would depend too much on the subtitles and pay less attention to linguistic elements. They suggested that students do the extensive or lengthy viewing outside the classroom. Nevertheless, Katchen (1997) assigned her students transcription activities using episodes from the Chinese-subtitled *X-Files*, and concluded that her advanced students benefited from the textual support.

Further, regarding the use of native language subtitles, Chung & Chiao (1999) examined how learners form mental representations when viewing with reversed subtitling (English subtitles and L1 spoken dialogue). They found that students were capable of processing mental representations if provided simultaneous verbal and image inputs with reversed support, regardless of their actual level of proficiency in the target language.

This author (Lin, 1996) compared the effects of single-subtitle viewing (Chinese textual support) and dual subtitles (both English and Chinese) on students'

self-perception of learning outcomes and motivation. It was discovered that students favored the use of dual subtitling as an avenue toward enhanced listening skills. And Lin further compared the effects of English subtitles and dual subtitles upon students' short term listening comprehension and discovered that the dual subtitles group outperformed the closed caption group (Lin, 2001a). But it was only to test students' listening comprehension on the basis of short-term exposure to two different subtitling.

With regard to the efficacy of the extensive learner-centered way of viewing, Lin (2001b) further conducted a project to examine how the adoption of learner-centered approach in the film-based instruction could affect overall oral performance and listening comprehension. Although the statistic results showed that there was no significant difference in the listening comprehension. But students' qualitative data echoed that the extensive self-directed film projects done from their chosen Chinese-subtitled film was greatly beneficial to their listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

The above literature is unfortunately short of the research for demonstrating practical strategies and techniques to tackle with the viewing of films with Chinese subtitles. The next two parts will contribute the demonstration of some efficient and practical guidelines for making two types of media resources.

Strategies for Viewing Controllable Media Resources

There are several types of controllable resources, for example: VCR, computer, VOD system (Video On Demand), LD/DVD, and VCD technologies. When using these technologies, viewers can control their pace and engage in repeated viewing of segments as befits their levels and needs. Especially, with 'Movie English VCD' technology (Lin, 1999), students can have many alternatives for choosing different exercises for improving their vocabulary, listening, and speaking. With the advent of DVD technology, the learners can manipulate various functions, for example, repeating viewing, switching subtitles, and connecting with the Internet for extra-feature activities.

The following are some effective strategies discovered both by this author in her many years' experiences and from her students' feedback.

Repeating viewing. Since most Hollywood films are targeted at native speakers instead of EFL/ESL learners, most students feel that the spoken dialogues are too fast for them to follow. Therefore, they would just simply depend on the Chinese subtitles to figure out the meaning of the spoken dialogues and the plot, and assume that they cannot understand any of the dialogues by listening. In fact, from students' survey, they found it was not so difficult for them to understand the dialogues with several

repeated viewings.

From this author's classroom experience, one of the most beneficial methods of viewing Chinese-subtitled films and escaping the habit of totally depending on the Chinese subtitles is to assign students to do the film project (Lin, 1998) to jot down about 50-60 phrases or vocabulary. For accomplishing the assignment, students have to repeat listening of the dialogues for many times. Most of her students echoed that with the strategy of repeated viewing (Lin, 2000b), they no longer felt that it was impossible for them to understand the rapid dialogues in the film. And they felt they have conquered the self-defeating attitude, and experienced a sense of achievement.

Taking Notes. The medium of film is designed to capture the viewer; for the classroom setting this means the student may too quickly become engrossed in the plot line and forget their goal of language learning. Chinese subtitling only makes it easier to fall into the world of the film. The habit of taking notes or jotting down some daily-life dialogues can help students maintain their academic focus. Students taking part in this practice report having to guess the spellings of some difficult on-screen utterances, then looked them up in the dictionary when the lights came back on. Or they simply wrote down some slang, idioms and short commonly used words which sounded familiar to them. The quick glance at the Chinese subtitles while listening to the spoken dialogues helped them to recall the vocabulary, phrases, or sentences, while the hearing of the spoken dialogues confirmed their guessing. After the matching of Chinese subtitles with spoken dialogues, they hoped to write them down for later reviewing and practice.

Doing Exercise. Most film packages do not provide extra exercises or drills for learners to reinforce their learning, except 'Movie English' VCD packages, which are equipped with film content itself and miscellaneous exercises for post-viewing activities (Lin, 1999). If students can take part in certain related exercises after they finish viewing the film, they can improve their vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills.

Pre-reading Transcripts. Some students expressed to this author that if they could read the written scripts before viewing, they could understand more about the plot, learn more vocabulary, and feel more confident about their listening ability. The transcripts can also help to sharpen their translation skills by comparing their own translation and the shown subtitles. Besides, the scripts can challenge some advanced students' translation skills by pointing out some inaccurate translations shown on the screen (Katchen, 1997). There are many web sites that can provide either free or paid scripts downloading. One of the most useful resources is Drew's Script-O-Rama web-site: http://www.script-o-rama.com/, which is a comprehensive index of more than 600 movie and television for free downloading.

Strategies for Viewing Uncontrollable Media

While viewing films with uncontrollable equipment such as TV movies or theatre, viewers cannot control the pace or do repeated viewings. Therefore, it would be more difficult for the students to benefit from this way of viewing. In order to understand how students themselves learn English from this way of viewing, this author at the beginning of 2002 semester tried to solicit students' opinions. She showed the film *"It Could Happen to You"* with Chinese subtitles to her 250 students and asked them to write down their used strategies while viewing this film in the classroom. The strategies and techniques presented by her students were very impressive and creative. The following will demonstrate both students' self-discovered and this instructor's strategies. The strategies will be categorized into three aspects: *vocabulary acquisition*, *listening*, and *speaking*.

Vocabulary Acquisition.

According to some students' feedback, at the fist appearances of Chinese subtitles, the viewers should try to guess the upcoming English words to represent the shown Chinese subtitles. Then after hearing the words they can confirm their guessing. If their guessing is right, they can simply store in their memory or write down key words in a piece of paper with a simple or condensed way, and later look up the dictionary. It is better that learners bring the notes with them and review them whenever and wherever they can. The vocabulary can be professional terms, popular words, or daily-life words. Since they learn these words in real context, the images can help the viewers to remember the meaning of words more easily, and have a better idea about how to use these words in the appropriate contexts.

Listening

Although most of the author's students said they prefer viewing films with bilingual subtitles, they still brought up many valuable insights and opinions about the strategies they used while they were viewing Chinese-subtitled films. The following are the skills they listed for listening strategies.

Setting Goals. Based on some students' opinions, the viewers should set up their own goals according to their level and needs before the viewing of films. If they are in the initial stage of trying to use films as the tools for improving their listening, they should focus on understanding only short utterances, simple sentences, or slow speech. After they feel they have improved their listening comprehension, then they can go on to longer ones, more complex sentences or quicker speech. In doing this, they might avoid the sense of frustration at the initial stage and have a sense of

challenge or achievement. One student stressed: "Never set the goal too high at the beginning, otherwise you are destined to fail." Another student pointed out that "with rapid and long utterances, the objective is to get the general meaning out of it; with slow and short dialogues, the goal is to achieve total comprehension ."

Prediction. In some cinematic scenes, Chinese subtitles are shown *before* the dialogues, others vice versa. Some students recommended that the viewers should take a quick glance of Chinese subtitles for grasping the general meanings, predict what dialogues might match the subtitles, then concentrate on listening to the spoken dialogues. In going through this process, they thought they could comprehend more. But, students also pointed out that not all the Chinese subtitles will come before the spoken language—sometimes they are projected simultaneously or after the spoken dialogues. If this happened, the reverse order will be more appropriate, first listening, then refer to the Chinese subtitles to confirm or compare what has been said.

Tolerance Attitude. Some students stated that they sometimes were stopped at the point of listening to some words that they have never heard or learned. Or sometimes they would simply rely on the Chinese subtitles. But, afterward they felt that they couldn't benefit much from this way of viewing, and then instead of paying too much attention on those individual words, they shifted to focus on the general meaning of the sentences or paragraphs. From doing this strategy, they found out that they could lower their anxiety toward rapid spoken dialogues and step by step to build up their proficiency for acquiring new words without feeling frustrated.

Taking Notes. The habit of taking notes during the viewing of controllable media resources is also an effective way for the viewing of uncontrollable ones. The exception is when the dialogue dashes by too swiftly. Therefore, the viewers might just jot down what they can catch from short utterances or familiar vocabulary at the beginning of sentences—or else they miss viewing some parts in order to jot down some items.

Occasional Ignorance. Viewers may unconsciously obsess over the on-screen subtitles. Therefore, they might not benefit from the viewing for the target language learning. In order to make enable the Chinese as a *facilitator* instead of an *obstacle*, the instructor needs to encourage students purposely and frequently to ignore the existence of it and only pay attention to the spoken dialogues. Some students echoed that this is a very important strategy to learn English from the viewing of films on TV or in the theatre. And the practice of this strategy lies at the viewers' determination and self-awareness. Once the learners started to do practices, they will feel that they can understand more and more dialogues in the films through listening.

Speaking

Some people might assume that the use of films can only improve students' listening and vocabulary acquisition, but in fact, the visual images combined with audio channel can provide real-world context for the viewers to witness the situations for using certain expressions and to see how the characters pronounce the words. This offers a perfect model for the learners to imitate the different tones and intonation uttered by the different characters in different situations. There are students who noted that they could guess the meanings of utterances from the shape of characters' mouth and facial expressions. And from paying attention to how some words are deleted, abbreviated or combined, they could pick up how native speakers interact with each other. This part of learning is one of the most difficult for non-native speakers to acquire in the process of language learning. Imitating and following what the characters say are the most effective strategies for acquiring the ways the native speakers speak.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Since all the strategies mentioned above aim at self-directed learning outside the classroom, the viewers' self-awareness and determination will decide the effectiveness of the strategies. It is difficult and inevitable for the viewers not to depend on the Chinese subtitles while viewing; the possible solutions lie at how the teacher can show the students way to get rid of the habit of completely depending on the Chinese subtitles. Once students experienced the achievement of their efforts, they would voluntarily try the effective ways of learning English. If it is possible, the teacher should try to encourage students rent controllable software such as DVD and VCD, which can provide more flexible ways of viewing. And students should be encouraged to download the scripts before viewing, which can help to comprehend the plot and make the listening comprehension more easily.

At the end of the literature review in this part, some of this author's previous students' feedback over the years toward the use of Chinese subtitles will be concluded in the following.

1). Chinese subtitles can help them figure out the meanings of those dialogues that are not understood by mere listening;

2). Chinese subtitles can encourage low level students to maintain focus and motivation, rather than giving up in the face of difficulty;

3). Chinese subtitles can facilitate the comprehension of technical, scientific and professional terms and slang;

4). Chinese subtitles can provide high-level students with the opportunities to

challenge their English proficiency by finding the mistakes on the Chinese subtitles.

Some students expressed that the best way of improving the English through films are: 1). Try to view as many films as you can; 2). Motivate yourselves; 3). Challenge yourselves for every time of film viewing; 4). Accumulate more and more vocabulary; 5). Remind yourselves that the viewing of films is not just for pleasure but also for learning.

For those teachers who are thinking about using Chinese-subtitled films to motivate students' learning can try the following tasks: 1). Assign your students to do film projects; 2). Ask your students to discover their own strategies for learning from Chinese-subtitled films; 3). Share your own experiences with students; 4). Provide students with some effective strategies and give them chances to do practice. With the sharing and cooperation between the teacher and students, the learning can be more productive and impressive!

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